

Prepared Statement of  
Mr. Andrew Grey, Tribal Chairman, Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe  
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
Subject: Public Law 102-477 and Welfare Reform  
April 14, 1999

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Andrew Grey; I am Chairman of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe of the Lake Traverse Reservation. It is a pleasure to be here to testify about the tribe's involvement with P.L.102-477, the Indian Employment, Training and Related Services Demonstration Act of 1992 and Welfare Reform.

The Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe has been a "477" grantee since 1994 and have found 477 approach to be excellent way of delivering employment and training services on the Lake Traverse Reservation. On behalf of the tribe, I would like to thank this committee and Congress for enacting the "477" law which allows Tribes to consolidate employment, training and related services programs into one comprehensive program.

The tribe has an enrollment of 10,227 member with approximately forty-five percent of them living on or near the reservation. According to the most recent Bureau of Indian Affairs data, the unemployment rate on the reservation is approximately 50%. The poverty rate among Indian people is over 60% according to 1990 Census data. The reservation is very rural and contains several communities the largest being the City of Sisseton, which has a population of 2200. Lack of jobs, basic education, skill training, childcare facilities, transportation, and substance abuses are the major barriers to employment for many tribal members.

In March of 1994 the tribe started its 477-demonstration project. In October of 1997 the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF) was integrated into 477. In March of this year the tribe embarked on another historic course by entering into a Cooperative Agreement with the State of South Dakota for child support enforcement services on the Lake Traverse Reservation. Hopefully, this agreement will help defray some of the expenses associated with administering a welfare program.

Currently the tribe has integrated the following programs into 477:

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|--------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| B.I.A. | Adult Vocational Training                             |
|        | Direct Employment Assistance                          |
|        | General Assistance                                    |
|        | Tribal Work Experience Program                        |
| D.O.L. | Job Training Partnership Act Title IV-A               |
|        | Job Training Partnership Act Title II-B, Summer Youth |
|        | Welfare to Work                                       |
| H.H.S. | Native Employment Works Program                       |
|        | Child Care Development Fund                           |
|        | Temporary Assistance for Needy Families               |

It should be noted that the tribe does not receive State matching funds for TANF. The 477 approach to delivering employment and training services was one the main reasons behind the Tribal Council decision to administer its own welfare program. 477 provides the needed resources to support welfare recipients so they are able engage in TANF work activities.

The primary beneficiary of the tribe's implementation of 477 has been and continues to be clients who are in need of employment/training services. Because TANF and General Assistance have been integrated into 477, these welfare recipients automatically become clients of the program. Integration has greatly reduced the tribe's administrative burden thus staff have more time to improve the effectiveness of services, identify client needs, and develop services to address those needs. Welfare recipients, hard to serve clients with multiple barriers to employment, have benefitted most from the additional staff time.

Additionally, the 477 program has and continues to be a major player in support of tribal economic development. In 1995 the tribe decided to relocate and restructure a stagnant tribal enterprise into a more diversified vibrant enterprise, the 477 program was used to give prior training and work experience for an expanded workforce. 22 of 29 participants entered employment as result of this 477 initiative to support tribal economic development. In 1997, the tribe opened a new gaming establishment, which created over 300 jobs for tribal members. The 477 program was able to assist 106 individual with supportive services, which enabled them to obtain and retain employment. The end result of this effort was a 22% reduction in the AFDC caseload.

In October of 1998, the tribe began expanding its gaming enterprise-the addition of an 80-room hotel. This expansion will create 40 new jobs for tribal members. In December of 1998, the 477 in collaboration with the Sisseton-Wahpeton Community College developed a 120-hour intensive Job Readiness Training course specifically tailored to welfare recipients and the hotel management. As of April 1, the hotel management has hired 15 TANF recipients, who graduated from this training. Hopefully, this prior training will reduce start up costs and help assure the success of this enterprise.

The above examples of support for economic development would not have happened if the tribe did not have a 477 program. The flexibility and resources of an integrated program made it possible.

Program data show that on an average month four (4) welfare recipients are placed into unsubsidized employment. However, this success has not reduced the tribe's welfare caseload. The caseload has remained relatively constant. This can be attributed to the following reasons: There has been a constant influx of new cases. The majority of the new cases are young mothers. Young people comprise the highest percentage of the resident tribal population. The program has a 45% reoccurrence rate among welfare cases. Cases reopen because a loss of employment (problems with childcare and transportation) and ongoing domestic problems. Lack of support from the non-custodial parent.

The tribe will continue to commit the majority of its limited resources for economic development

and job creation activities. We are also currently in the planning stages as to how best to address problems with childcare. Solving childcare problems undoubtedly will require a commitment of tribal resources.

The tribe is in need of funds to plan and implement strategies to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, with special emphasis on reducing teenage pregnancies.

Additionally, the tribe needs funds to plan and provide services to non-custodial parents. The Tiospa Zina Tribal School experiences a high school graduating class that is 50% in size of the ninth grade class four years prior. The graduating class is routinely 70% female. Students who dropout are primarily male. Therefore, employability among young adult males on the reservation is extremely low. They are in need of a set of comprehensive employment/training services. . Currently, the 477 program does not have the resources to address all the employment and training needs of custodial parents as well as the needs of those who are unemployed, underemployed or economically disadvantaged.

Also, the tribe needs funds to plan and implement transportation services so Indian people who obtain employment will be able to retain their job.

On behalf of the Tribal Council, I would like to make the following recommendations to improve the 477 initiative and better equip tribes to deal with the impact of welfare reform.

2. That Congress re-authorize the Welfare to Work program through 2002 with an increase in the tribal set-aside. Funding for tribal programs should be set at not less than 3% of the funds available.
2. If Welfare to Work Legislation is re-authorized and if a State does not apply for formula funding, the new legislation should provide the tribe the right to receive a proportionate share.
3. That B.I.A. and the other federal agencies provide financial support for the technical assistance efforts of the 477 Tribal Work Group. Welfare reform may force additional tribes to develop a 477 program and include TANF in the integrated program.
4. That B.I.A. insure adequate staff resources to properly support the 477 initiative.
5. That Congress amend the Personal Responsibility Act to allow HHS to modify the TANF reporting requirements. Current reporting requirements place a heavy administrative burden upon tribes. The TANF reporting requirements should be based upon tribal circumstances instead of State requirements.

In conclusion I would like to state that the tribe is very concerned about what will happen between now and the year 2002. Tribal welfare caseloads have not experienced a reduction. It should also be noted that the provision which disregards months welfare assistance received by an adult living on an Indian Reservation with a 50 percent unemployment rate does not apply on the Lake Traverse Reservation. The tribe sincerely believes that it best knows the needs of its

people and can best determine how to address those needs and it has made a very concerted effort, with limited resources to reduce the impact of welfare reform on our reservation. Any reduction of funding will severely hamper the tribe's efforts and will have a very negative impact on the poor quality of life now being experienced by many of our tribal members.

This concludes my prepared statement. I would be please to respond to any questions the Committee may have.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.